DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 019 CS 210 320

AUTHOR Comprone, Joseph J.
TITLE The New Rhetoric: A Way of Connecting Community and Discourse Conventions in Writing across the Disciplines Courses.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (38th, Atlanta, GA, March 19-21, 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiences; *Content Area Writing; Curriculum Development; English Instruction; Higher Education; Instructional Development; *Persuasive Discourse; Rhetoric; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Instruction; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Audience Awareness; *New Rhetoric; Olbrechts Tyteca (L); Perelman (Chaim); Rhetorical Community; Toulmin (Stephen); *Writing across the Curriculum

ABSTRACT

Content area writers need a method of operating that integrates the ways of science but without using the proofs used by specialists. Two concepts from the New Rhetoric--S. Toulmin's "warrants" and C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca's "universal audience"--might enable English professors to serve a regulative or balancing function as they develop writing across the curriculum programs. If writing teachers in any discipline were to base assignments on the idea that part of the students' job would be to search out and understand the warrants behind the method of inquiry in their disciplines, then writing might become a way of learning the discipline's values and methods as well as of imitating the surface of the discourse produced. This leads to the contention that the concept of universal audience must lie behind any argument, no matter how specific the particular audience to which the argument is addressed. This universal audience assents to the way a writer validates an experience or idea. The dialectic between universal and particular audience is necessary for the writer to create a rhetorical context. The concepts of warrants and universal audience will give English teachers the strategies they need to provide the perspectives on texts that will assure both the rigor and breadth required of good writing. (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED279019

The New Rhetoric: A Way of Connecting Community and Discourse Conventions in Writing Across the Disciplines Courses

For the past two years I have been helping develop a writing across the curriculum program at the University of Louisville. My work has progressed on two levels. First, I have been part of an intensive, two-year process of general education review, as a member of a specially-designated taskforce that, first, developed an entirely new plan for general education for the University and, second, interacted with University faculty, students, and administrators in forums, committees, and legislative bodies as that initial plan was revised and finally approved. This new plan for general education included a writing across the curriculum component, now required of every unit in this urban university of over 20,000 students, including professional schools of engineering, business, nursing, and urban studies as well as the more traditional arts and sciences disciplines.

Second, I have, as Director of Composition with an appointment in the English Department, overseen the revision of composition courses that might prepare students to write in a variety of disciplines, and in a variety of professional situations. I've met with paranoia and defensiveness on both sides, and I've occasionally met with a delightful willingness to revise current understandings of how academic discourse works. In every case, I've also met with confused and potentially explosive attempts to explain what Stephen Toulmin would have called "field-dependent" and universal models of reading and writing. But, also in every case, problems of pedagogy could have been solved by an effort on all sides to clarify the relationship between the rhetoric of particular fields and the demands of universal audiences. English teachers, if they can pick up on the rhetorical tradition

CS210320

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

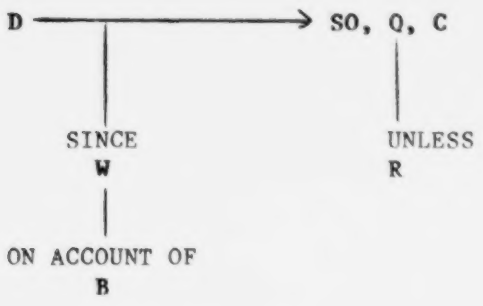
Joseph J. Comprone

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

as it has recently developed, can serve an important function in this balancing of rhetorical perspectives. In this paper, I wish only to introduce two concepts from the New Rhetoric, and to close by explaining how these concepts might help English Department writing specialists and administrators develop strategies for combining "field-dependent" and universal approaches to writing. These key ideas are Toulmin's concept of warrants for arguments and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's concept of the universal audience. With these strategies, English professors might be able to serve a regulative or balancing function as they help universities develop writing across the curriculum programs.

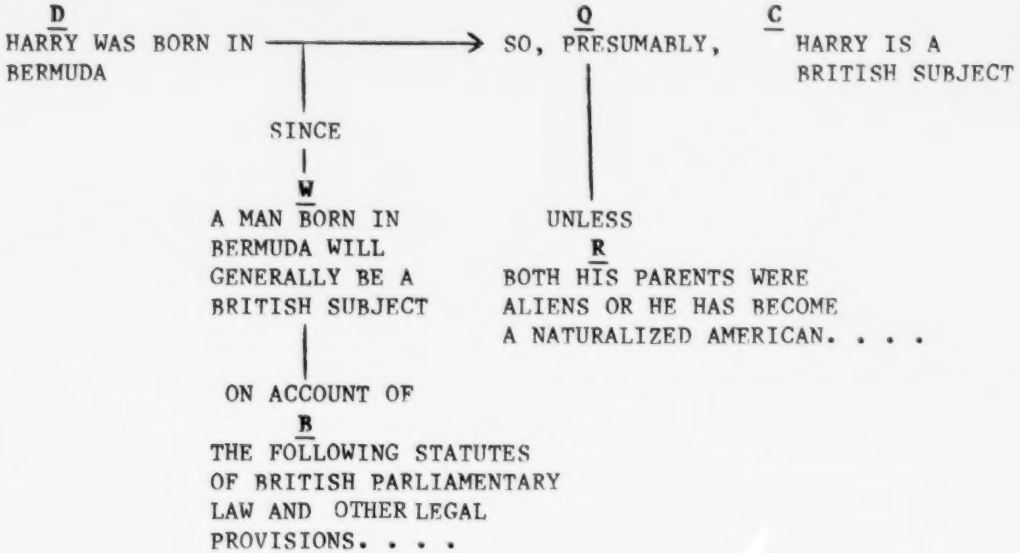
Toulmin (The Uses of Argument, pp. 94-118) develops his expanded argumentative model (or "lay-out," as he calls it) because he believes the traditional model of argument (minor premise--major premise--conclusion) simply does not contain sufficient recognitiion of the social dimension of all argument. Rhetoricians know that Aristotle began this tendency to separate "scientific" from "rhetorical" argument when he devided discourse into specialized and limited fields of certain knowledge and the more general field of rhetoric, where only probability could be established. In the twentieth-century, Toulmin asserts, we have driven the wedge between science and rhetoric ever more deeply into the ground of our theories of argument. Wayne Booth (in Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent) attributes much of this tendency to apply mathematical forms to areas of discourse where it cannot be applied to modernist philosophers and critics such as I.A. Richards and Bertrand Russell, who made clear but unwarrantable distinctions between emotive and referential language. Such dividers of science and rhetoric

STEPHEN TOULMIN'S LAY-OUT OF AN ARGUMENT



D = DATA BEHIND A CLAIM
C = CLAIM, THAT RESULTS FROM AN ARGUMENT
W = WARRANT, DEFINES THE RELATION BETWEEN D AND C,
TELLS HOW THE RELATION WAS MADE
B = BACKING, THE SOCIAL AGREEMENT BEHIND THE WARRANT
Q = QUALIFICATIONS OF A CLAIM
R = REBUTTAL, THE REASONS BEHIND QUALIFICATIONS

EXAMPLE FROM TOULMIN (P. 105)



assumed that particular failures of logical and mathematcal application to problems of rhetoric meant that all attempts to apply systematic inquiry to everyday discourse were bound to fail. Toulmin tries to reverse this pattern of extreme scepticism about the possibilities for a systematic rhetoric by emphasizing the social components in all argument. The diagram that follows proposes a data-claim relationship as the superordinate proposition in any argument. But it completes this experiential-rhetorical model by positing four additional terms, each of which grows out of the social context of an argument:

warrants --the socially agreed-upon ways of connecting data and claim

backings --the particular laws or conventions that arguers use to establish warrants

qualifications --the modifiers arguers use to establish the degree of force they wish to give an argument (presumably, probably, definitely, without a doubt, and the like)

rebuttals --the statements that describe the exceptions that are used to specify the reasons behind a qualfication.

I do not have the time to elaborate on Toulmin's lay-out. I simply at this point wish to point to the overall function and influence of his expanded sense of argument, particularly as it applies to writing across the curriculum. Writers in cross-disciplinary courses are writing as learners, not as experts. They need to be presented with a method of operating that links up with the ways of science, but they cannot be expected to use the kind of specialist proofs that specialists use. Nor do we, as writing teachers, wish to have students leaving our courses believing that, when it

comes to everyday life, nothing can be systematically studied or persuasively presented. What we do need is a way of discoursing that encourages students to consider both the formal and social dimensions of an argument.

Using Toulmin's example as it is described in our diagram, we can see how an argument from experience (the fact that Harry was born in Bermuda and the claim that he then must be a British citizen) becomes, by the application of the warrant-backing, qualification-rebuttal concepts, a social as well as formal analysis. Students are asked to look for the social agreement that lies behind the argument (warrant: "A man born in Bermuda will generally be a British subject."), to search further for the backing or facts and conventions behind that warrant ("The following statutes and legal provisions support this warrant."), and to consider possible qualifications and the specific rebuttals that might work against taking this argument as fully persuasive: in this case, that we can only presume the argument to be true because two exceptions might rebut the claim that Harry is a British citizen.

How does this help us develop an approach to writing across the curriculum? At this point, Toulmin's treatment of field-dependency is helpful. Criteria for supporting arguments, Toulmin asserts, are always partially dependent on agreements made by members of particular discipline or field communities and partially dependent on universal ("field-invariant") logic and forms of proof (mathematics, for example). Most often field-dependent and universal elements of arguments are interactive and interdependent, and their relationship is different in each situation. If writing teachers in any discipline were to base every assignment on the idea that part of the student's job would be to search out and understand the

warrants behind the method of inquiry in their disciplines, then writing might become as much a way of learning the discipline's values and methods as it would be a way of imitating the surface of the discourse produced in that discipline, or of reproducing the qualities represented in the work of professional writers.

This application of Toulmin's model to writing across the curriculum brings me to Perelman's concepts of universal audience. In The New Rhetoric, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that a concept of universal audience (pp. 13-35) must lie behind any argument, no matter how specific the particular audience to which the argument is addressed. All specific audiences represent particular value systems and methodologies, but even intra-audience communication, however technically or methodologically restrictive, assumes a second layer or tier of audience that is composed of either a reasonable or experiential, universal community (p. 1).

This second layer of audience, the universal one, gives its assent to the way the writer validates an experience or idea; in our age this universal audience most often looks beyond content and method to larger values of reasonableness and observational acuity. Without this audience's existence in the mind of the writer, the discourse can have no general relevance--whatever is discovered or conceptualized within a field of inquiry can have no universal assent. Even the agreement to disagree, as a result, is destroyed. What Perelman and Toulmin have done with this idea of universal audience, however, is differentiate it from ideas of certainty based on objective or formal criteria--either rationalistic or empirical. For Perelman, the writer's belief in and construction of the universal audience

that will lie behind the particular audience of his or her field is a rhetorically necessary fiction, not an actual belief in an existing universal community. Each time our students write a paper in Psychology, for example, they might address the teacher of the class and peers as the immediate or particular audience, an audience that may share theories and empirical methods, but they must also posit a universal audience composed of reasonable psychologists who believe that the world should operate according to certain transcendent values. These transcendent values, and the universal audience they imply, provide the warrants, or the statements connecting data and claim in any argument. Without this dialectic between universal and particular audience, the writer is not able to create a rhetorical context; he or she can convince through formal proofs, but never persuade.

What English teachers can provide is a balanced perspective on both the production and consumption of texts. Texts are constructed out of the social-epistemological conventions shared by particular interpretive or discipline communities, but they are also constructed out of the writer's sense of universal audience, of an audience composed of reasonable men and women who stand behind these communities of specialists, providing an ethical and moral perspective that is often missing in the highly specialized discourses of particular fields. The concept of warrants and universal audience could give English teachers the strategies they need to provide the balanced perspectives on texts that will assure both the rigor and breadth required of good writing.

These theories need practical application that I must leave to another occasion. But I do wish to close by referring back to the general

education and composition program perspectives on writing that I mentioned in beginning this talk. Writing by students in universites, whether it is taught in English departments or across the disciplines, should always involve a central dialectic between the rhetoric of specialized fields and what we might call a universal rhetoric. That, for many years, English professors seemed to have forgotten that essential dialectic as they taught literature in ever more specialized ways is no excuse for introducing the same over-specializing tendency as we move writing across the curriculum. Writing in sociology or engineering that fails to connect particular and universal perspectives is as debilitating to the general education of students as were those restrictive perspectives on writing that were often imposed by highly-specialized litarary critics. But a new approach to texts, fostered by English teachers who know the New Rhetoric, might provide the right blend of particular and universal appeal that writing across the curriculum programs need.

Joseph Comprone

University of Louisville

Works Cited

Booth, Wayne. Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1974.

Perelman, Chaim and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca. The New Rhetoric. Trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver. Notre Dame, Ind.: U of Notre Dame P, 1969.

Toulmin, Stephen. The Uses of Argument. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1958.